NEHRU
BAL PUSTAKALAYA

THE VERDICT AND OTHER TALES FROM THE EAST

KALA THAIRANI

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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

THE VERDICT

A story from India

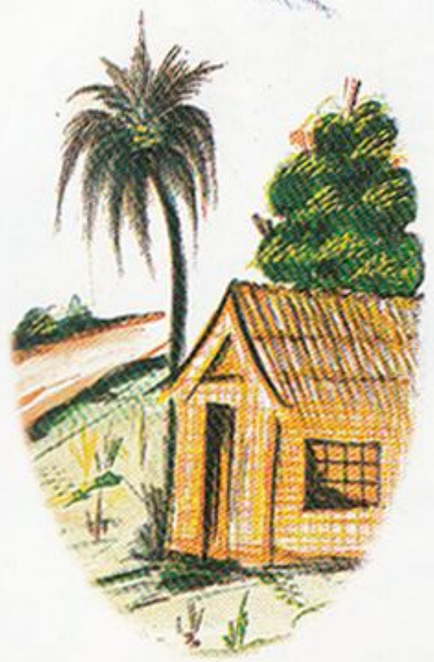
Long long ago, when the world began, there was a great dispute between the Sun and the Moon. The former said that he was greater than the Moon because he gave sunlight to the world, without which people could not live. The Moon would not agree. She said that without doubt, she was greater than the Sun.

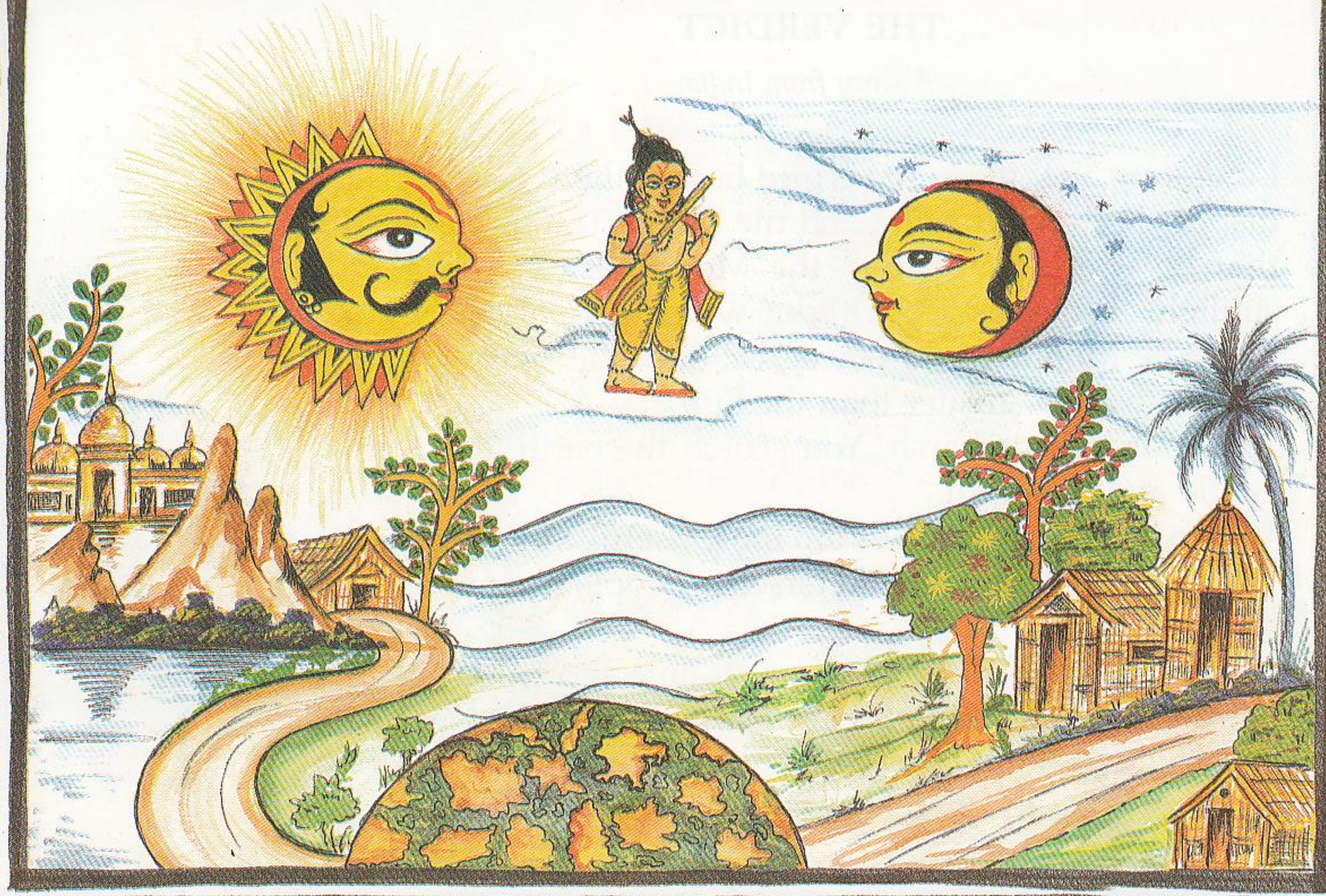
"Your light is harsh. You scorch the earth. But I am gentle and beautiful."

"I am greater because I am more useful," the Sun said.

"No," the Moon replied tersely. "People like me more. So I am greater."

Since they could not come to any agreement, they decided to seek the opinion of the divine sage Narada, known throughout Heaven for his wisdom and tact. They went to him, and explaining their respective points of





view, they asked him for his verdict.

"The Sun is greater during the day, and the Moon is greater during the night," said the wise Narada.

The Sun nodded his agreement. He thought it a fair verdict. But the Moon was adamant.

"That is neither here nor there," she said to Narada. "Tell us definitely who is greater at all times."

"Don't press me. It is not good to be stubborn," Narada advised.

"It is best to know the truth," the Moon said.

"Be it so," Narada replied. "I shall set you each a test."

He asked them to go into hiding, alternately for one day, so that he could judge who was greater. "I want to see who is missed more by the world."

The Moon was delighted with the suggestion. She was sure that people would miss her more. She said that she would be the first to hide.

Came the full-moon day when many people fast and

pray and wait in the evening to see the Moon before breaking their fast. On this day, the Moon decided to go into hiding. The world had only the Sun's light that day. When darkness fell, people came out in their courtyards and waited for the moon to rise. But no moon appeared that night. They waited for hours, watching the sky with anxious eyes. The darkness deepened, but still there was no sign of the Moon.

"What has happened today?" they asked.

"Perhaps it is cloudy," someone said.

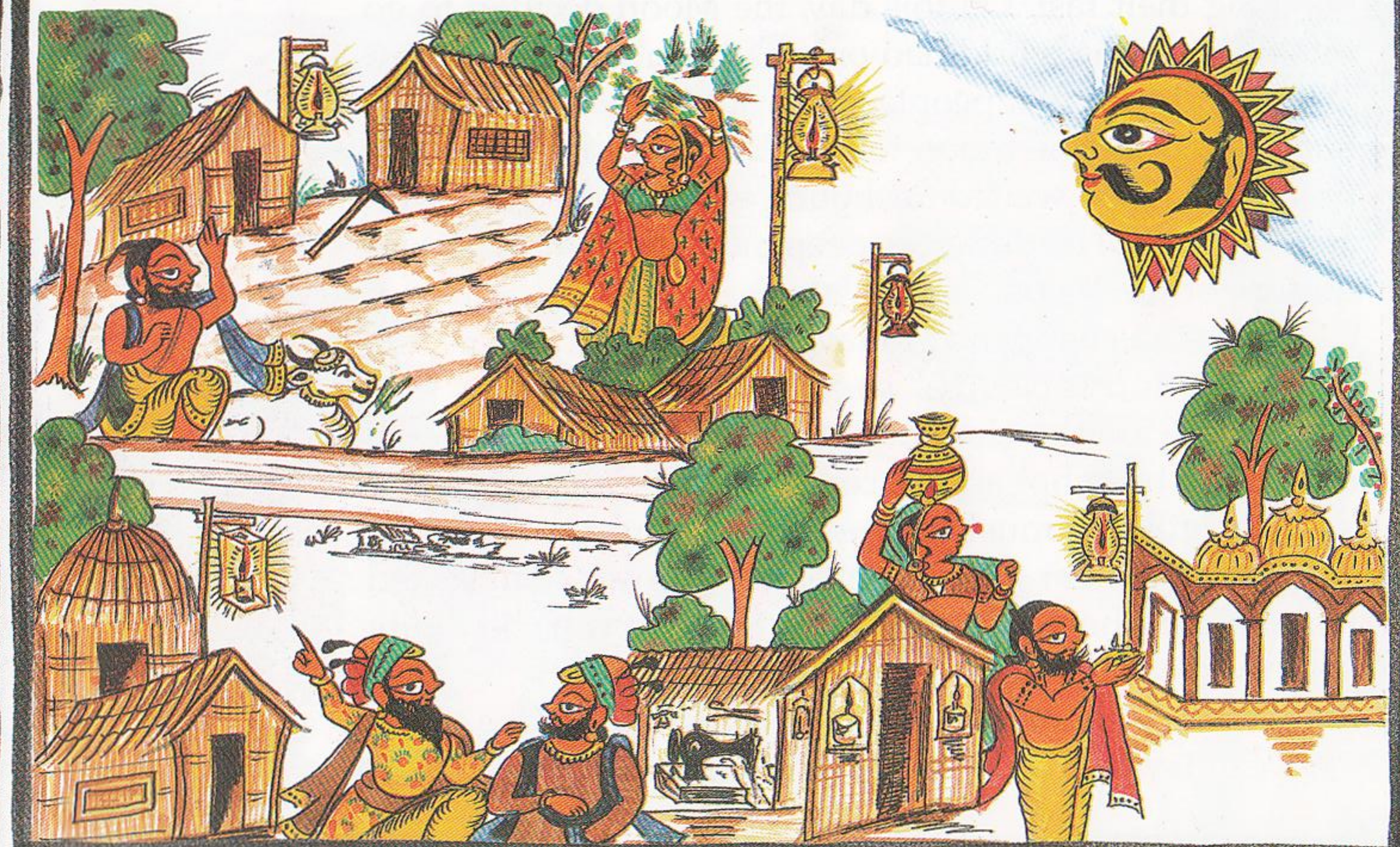
"Where are the clouds? Today the Sun has shone all day. It has been hot and uncomfortable."

This talk was music to the Moon's ears.

"Do you hear what they are saying?" she asked Narada. "See how they dislike the Sun. Do you still doubt about who is greater?"

"Wait till tomorrow is also over," said the sage.

Next day the Sun went into hiding, and the world was



plunged into darkness. At dawn, the people awoke as usual to begin their day's work, but they could see nothing. Time passed. It still remained dark. All work was at a standstill.

"How can we do anything in darkness?" they wailed.

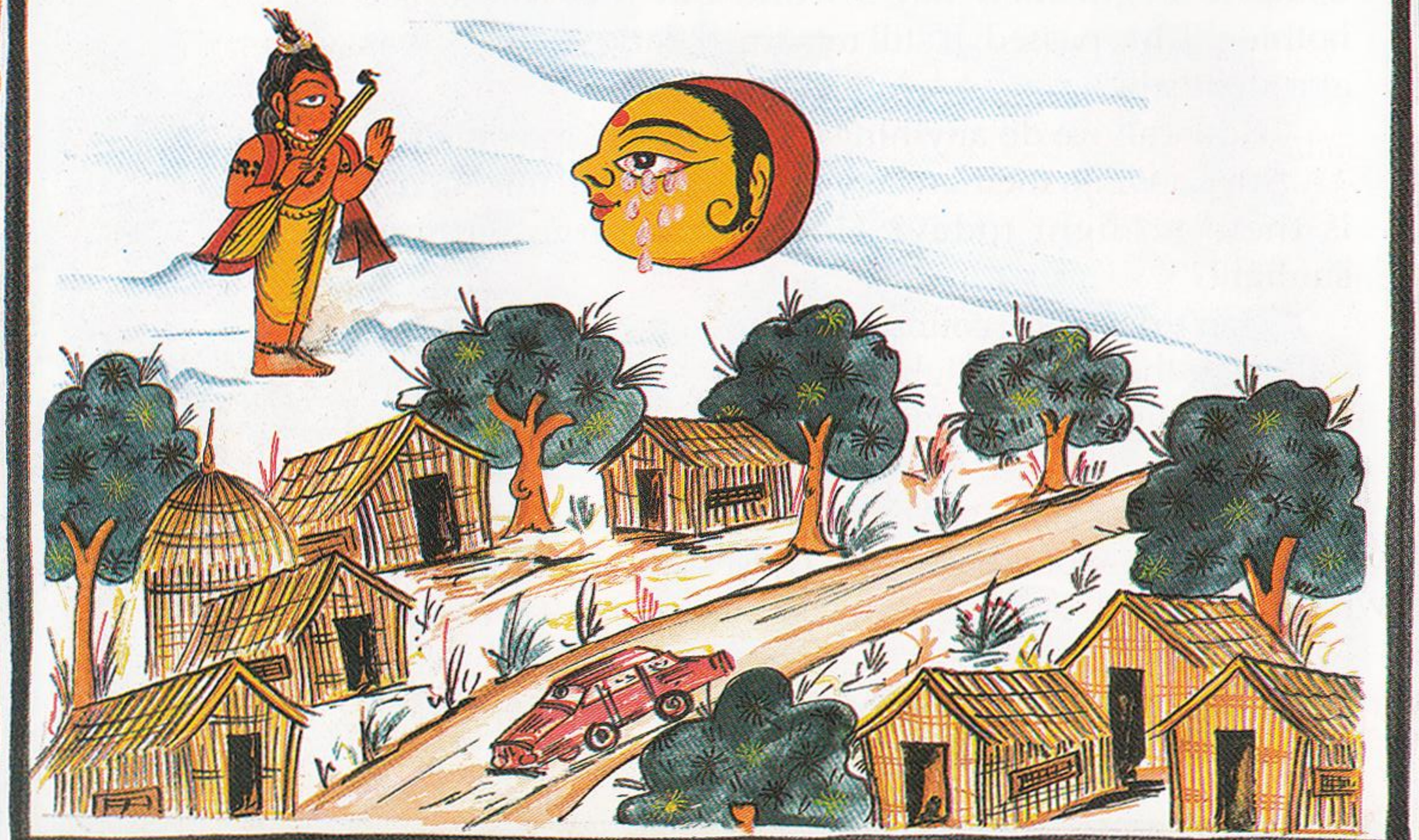
After a while their anxiety gave place to panic. "Why is there no light today? How can we live without sunlight?"

"Don't despair," counselled one man. "At night you will have the Moon's light."

"Moonlight is a poor substitute for daylight," they replied.

But even at night, to their consternation, they found that there was total darkness. To be sure, the Moon was right overhead, but there was no moonlight. It was dark everywhere.

The Moon could not understand what had happened. She went to Narada and asked in a frightened voice, "Why



is there no light in me, O sage?"

Narada smiled. "Because yours was a reflected light borrowed from the Sun. Now that the Sun is in hiding, you do not have the splendour with which to shine."

The Moon hung down her head in shame, and two big tears rolled down her cheeks. Narada said kindly, "I think you should accept my first verdict. Do you want me to give an absolute verdict?"

"No," replied the Moon.

GUNO AND KOYO

A story from Indonesia

Guno and Koyo are two names known to everyone in Indonesia. And whenever their names are mentioned people cannot suppress a smile, for Guno means "helpful" but he is really very unhelpful. Koyo means "wealth" but he rarely has any money. What is more, if Koyo ever acquires any wealth, his friend Guno, the helpful, helps him lose it.

It happened once that Guno and Koyo decided to rob an old Hadji (a Muslim holy man). In the darkness of the night they entered noiselessly into the Hadji's house and began to dig a hole in the wall. When the hole was big enough for one man to crawl through, Guno went inside, lit a candle and by its dim light collected the Hadji's valuables and passed them through the opening to Koyo who piled them neatly on the ground. As Guno was about

to leave, his eye fell on the Hadji's colourful robe hanging on a peg. He removed it and tried it on himself. "Oh, it is grand. I must not spoil it," he told himself, feeling the rich material with his hands. Seeing the Hadji sound asleep, he decided to leave by the front entrance. So he tiptoed to the door unlocked it and went out.

Meanwhile Koyo was waiting anxiously for Guno's return. He sat guarding the opening they had dug and wondered why his friend was taking so long inside. Just then, he saw a robed figure step out from the front door. He thought it was the Hadji.

"O-oh. The Hadji," he screamed in fright and fled, leaving behind their pile of loot.

The robed figure was none other than Guno himself. When he heard Koyo's frightened exclamation, he thought that the Hadji had awakened and was right behind him. So he threw down the robe and ran in swift pursuit after Koyo.

The two men made so much noise fleeing through the village that the neighbours woke up and rushed out with sticks and sickles to beat the culprits.

Guno and Koyo ran on in headlong flight, too afraid to stop and look back. They ran through the village and across the open fields until they came to the edge of the river.

"Quick. Jump in" said Guno. "We are finished," wailed Koyo. "If we jump in, we shall be drowned. If we don't, the villagers will catch us and kill us."

"Don't be a coward" Guno said. "The river is not in flood. We won't be drowned."

"If it were in flood," Guno reasoned," the water would be muddy. But it is so clear, you can see the bottom of the river."

Koyo leaned forward to take a proper look. In the faint starlight he could see the rocky surface of the riverbed.

"You may be right," he conceded. "But you go in first

and tell me how it is."

So Guno pulled himself up, breathed deeply, closed his eyes and leaped from the ledge.

He landed on an absolutely dry bed. The stones hurt his feet but he did not cry. Instead, he lay down and made swimming motions to convince his friend that there was nothing to fear.

Koyo shouted. "Why don't you say something? Is it all right?"

"Can't you see me swimming?" Guno asked and said, "The water is very nice."

The villagers were now close to the river and Koyo could hear the clanging of their weapons. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and jumped from the ledge.

Like Guno he landed on the dry riverbed and the stones hurt his feet and knees. "Oo-ho. Where is the water?" he asked Guno.

"Shut up, you fool. Try and swim like me; otherwise

they will pursue us here," Guno replied.

So Koyo also stretched himself on the ground and moved his legs and arms as though he was swimming.

The villagers had now reached the ledge. Looking down they gazed in wonder at the two frightened men trying to swim in the river that had been dry for months.

"Look, Look," they shouted to each other, amazed beyond belief. Then they laughed and put down their weapons. They could not bring themselves to punish such silly fugitives.

Since then, whenever a person tries to get out of a difficult situation by a foolish act, people tell him, "Don't go swimming in a dry riverbed."

EARLY FOR THE PICNIC

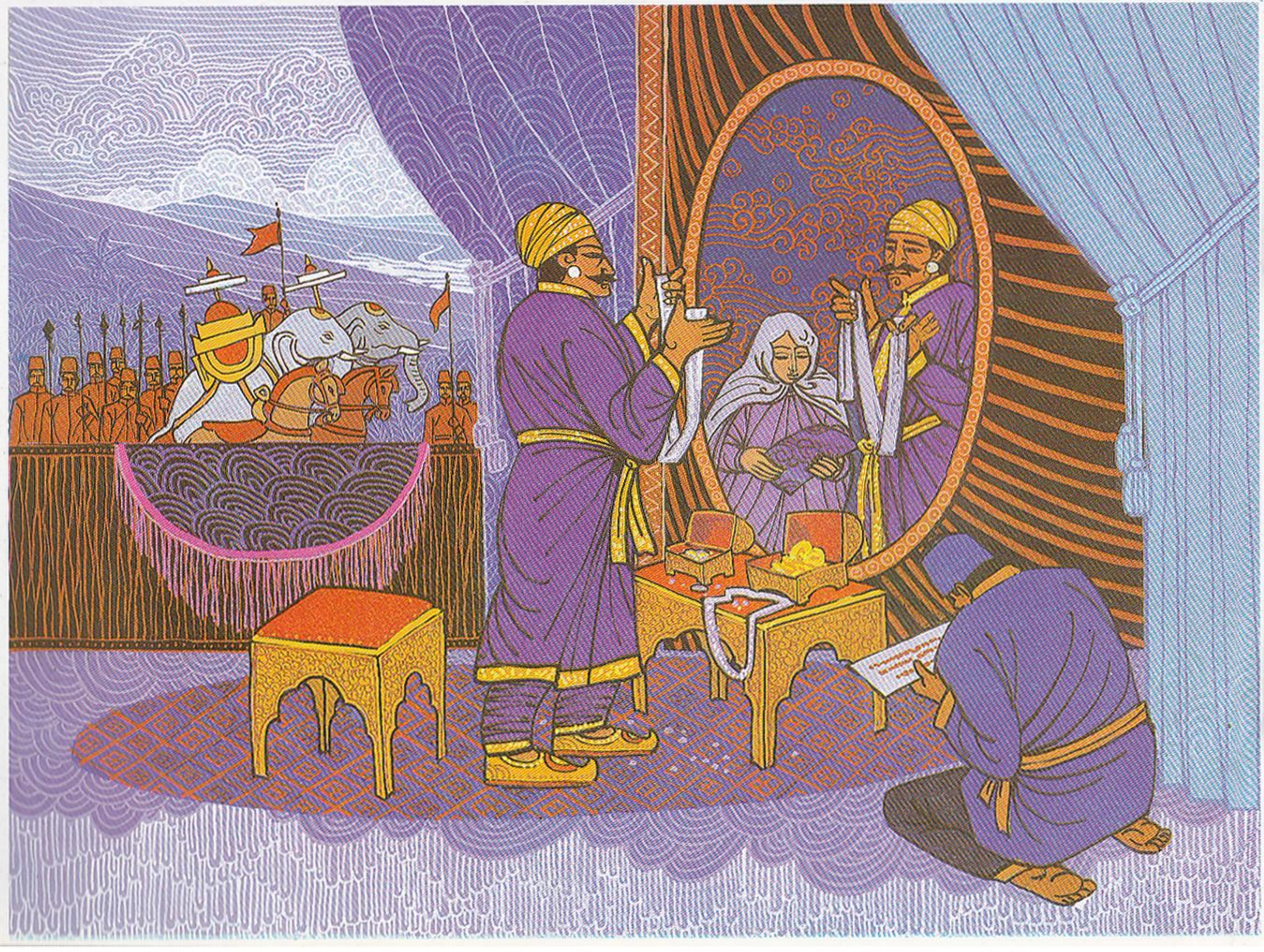
A story from Malaysia

What would you do if you had to deal with a man like the Sriwa Raja? He was always late, no matter what. But for once he met his match in a man named Tun Isak.

Sultan Mahmud Shah of Malacca was an ease-loving monarch who liked to spend his time on picnics and parties in the jungle. And whenever he planned such trips, he always wanted his favourites to come with him.

Among his favourites was a man called the Sriwa Raja, which means master of the King's Elephants. This man was a great favourite of the king. In fact, he was so sure of the royal favour that he often kept the king waiting for him, something that no one else in the kingdom would have dared to do.

The Sriwa Raja lived in a nice house up the river. The house was built in Malay style, on stilts, overlooking the river. It had a large verandah running round it. Here the Sriwa Raja would spend long hours, enjoying the lovely view of the river.

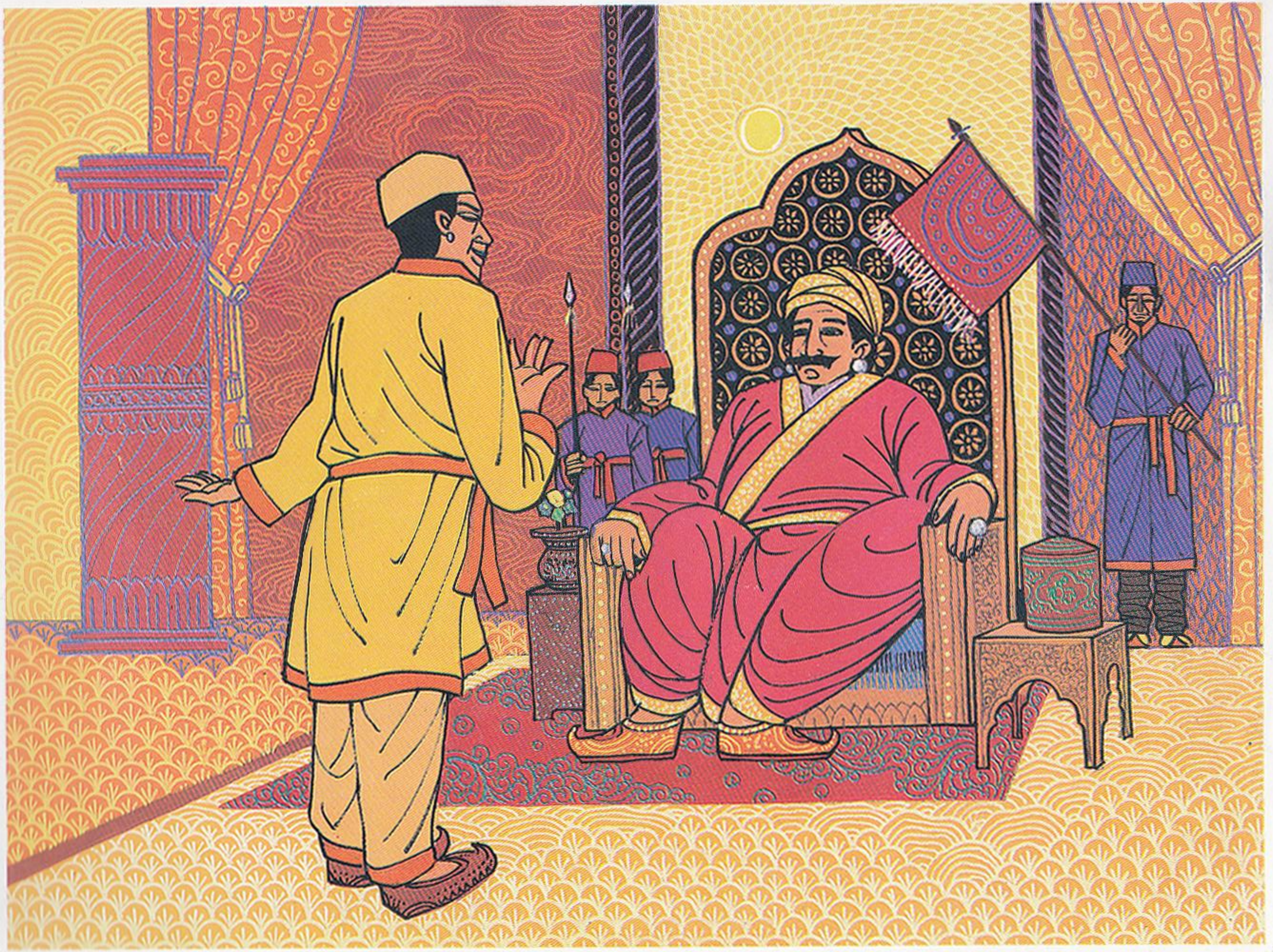


Whenever the Sultan thought of going for a picnic, he would set off from his palace in a barge and go up the river, stopping at the Sriwa Raja's house to call for him.

Now the Sriwa Raja was a man of leisurely habits. He was lazy and vain too. He did not really care to accompany the king on his excursions, but then how could he say no to his sovereign? So the moment he would see the royal barge coming up, he would literally dive into his house and lie down to have a nap.

Reaching his house, the royal barge would tie up at the landing and the Sultan would send his personal messenger in. The latter had to have permission to enter the house. When he did finally come in and deliver the king's message, the Sriwa Raja would pretend to wake up from his sleep, yawn and stretch his arms, saying, "I am thankful to His Majesty for the kind invitation. But you must give me time to get ready. I shall join the party as soon as I can."

Dressing up was a ritual with him. After the messenger's departure he would proceed to take his bath as slowly as he could. Next he would sit down to have a meal. After the meal he would put on his sarong, undoing



it several times until he got it exactly to his liking.

Then would come the jacket and the head cloth. With these he would repeat the same process as with the sarong, until they too were exactly to his liking. Finally he would wear his scarf with the utmost care, adjusting it several times before he felt satisfied.

When there was nothing more to do, he would go to the door, but before stepping out, he would turn back to find his wife. "Am I looking all right?" he would ask.

Heaven forbid if she should shake her head or point out some defect. For then he would rush back to his room and restart the whole process of getting ready.

By the time he managed to join the Sultan, the fun had gone out of the party. Everyone would look at him with silent irritation. Often the Sultan himself, tired of waiting, would decide to cancel the party and go home.

When this continued to happen again and again, the Sultan decided that it was time to deal firmly with the Sriwa Raja. So he called Tun Isak, a young man known for his resourcefulness, and told him, "Tomorrow we are going for a picnic. I do not want the Sriwa Raja to spoil it; will you go

ahead of us and get him to be ready in time?"

The young man nodded. "Tomorrow he shall not be late."

With his friends he worked out a plan.

Early next morning Tun Isak knocked at the Sriwa Raja's door. He did not ask for permission to enter the house. He simply came and sat in the verandah and asked for a mat so that he could wait in comfort.

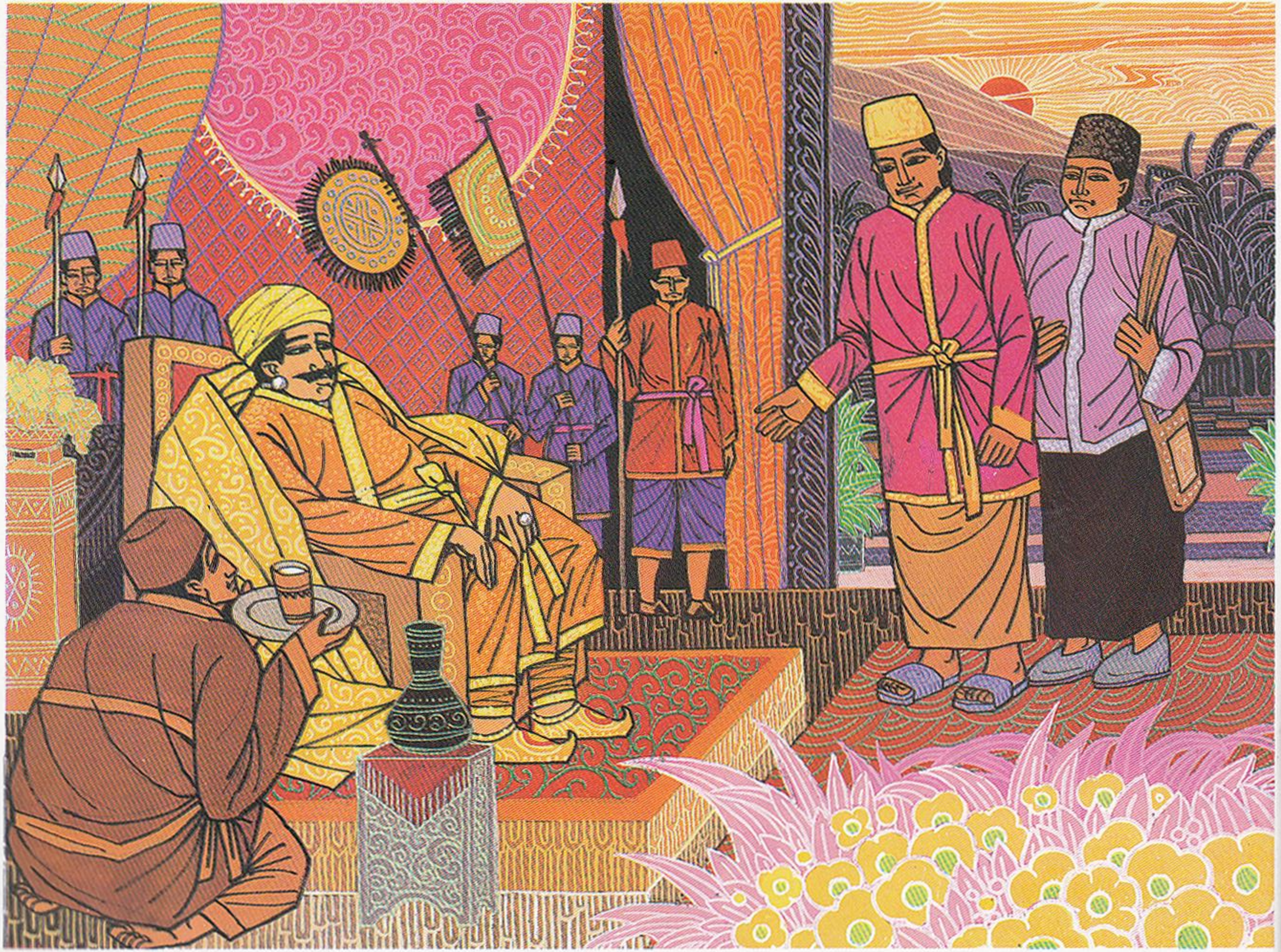
A while later he shouted in a loud voice so that the Sriwa Raja would hear every word. "Sriwa Raja will take a long time to get dressed. Bring me some rice to eat. I am hungry."

The servants could not refuse to bring the rice, for it is the custom of the Malays to be hospitable.

After having a large meal Tun Isak shouted for something to drink.

In the meantime Tun Isak's friends arrived on the scene. "Hurry up, Tun Isak," they called. "It is getting late for the picnic."

Now the Sriwa Raja, who as usual was pretending to be fast asleep, heard all the noise that was going on. "That Tun Isak," he muttered angrily to himself, "he makes a nuisance of himself wherever he goes. There is no end to the things he wants."



He got up hurriedly from his bed, put on his sarong, jacket and head cloth and came out. His wife and servants stared at him in wonder—they had never known him to be so quick in all his life. Nor did he stop at the door this time to ask his wife how he looked. He Just picked up his kris* and said quietly, "Tun Isak, let's go."

When they arrived at the palace, it was the Sultan's turn to be surprised. He looked at the Sriwa Raja in amazement. "What! You are here already?" the king exclaimed in astonishment.

The Sriwa Raja felt too confused to reply. Now it was his turn to wait for others, because the sun was just beginning to rise in the eastern sky and the party was not yet ready to leave for the picnic.

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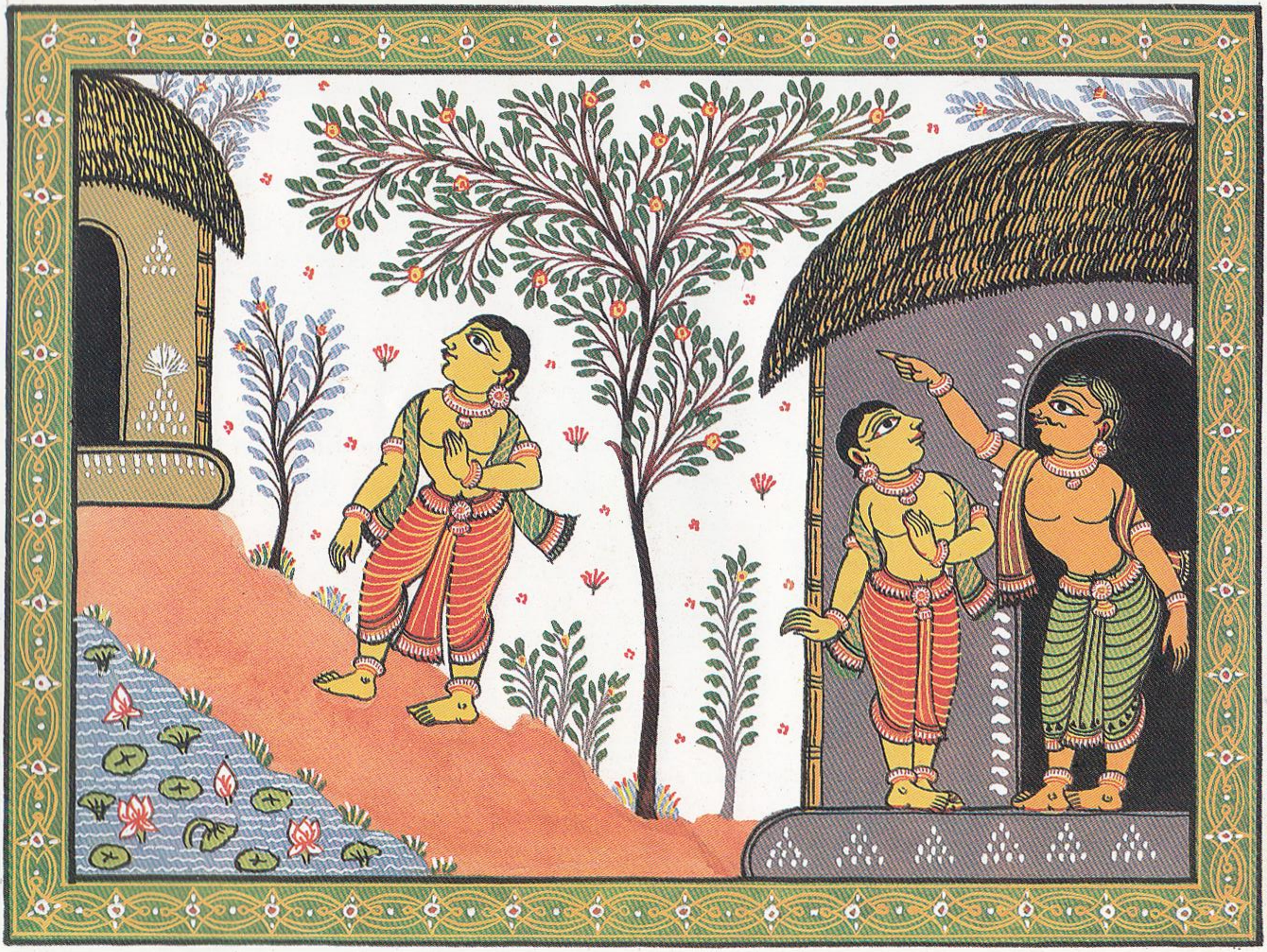
* A dagger with wavy blade, which is a part of a man's formal dress in Malaysi is called kris.



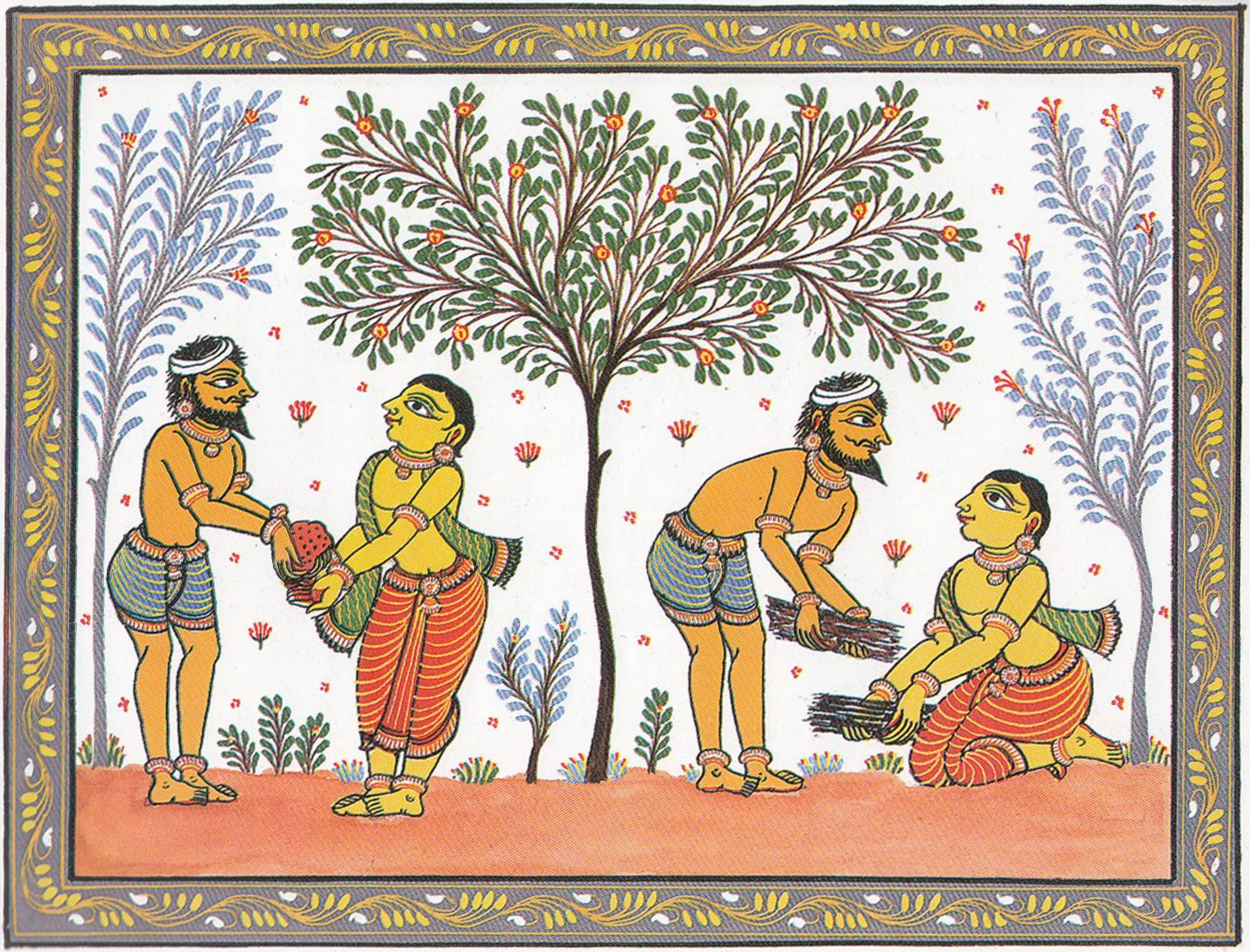
MILLSTONES IN THE SEA

A story from Japan

The Japanese have a custom according to which if a certain family does not have a male heir, it can adopt a husband for the oldest daughter. The adopted husband takes his wife's last name and goes to live with his wife's family. Naturally most men do not like such an arrangement. There is a well-known proverb which says, "As long as you have a single coin, never become an adopted husband."

This story is about two brothers who were poor and lived in a little house. Their parents were both dead. Taro, the older brother, was an unpleasant fellow. He often complained about their hard life and was always telling Jiro, the younger brother, to become an adopted husband. Seeing that his brother blamed him for their poverty, Jiro left home and went to work elsewhere.

After some time Jiro married. His wife was a simple girl and they were happy. When winter came there was no work to do and the couple were in distress. Then the last day of the year came when it is customary to prepare



a sumptuous meal and keep sufficient food for an offering to the gods on the following day for prosperity in the new year. What could they offer to the gods when they didn't have enough rice even for their meal? Jiro decided to go to his brother to borrow some rice.

"Why have you come to me for rice?" his brother shouted. "If you have not the sense to keep enough rice for the last meal, you go and borrow it from someone else. I gave you good advice but you didn't listen." With these words Taro shut the door on his face.

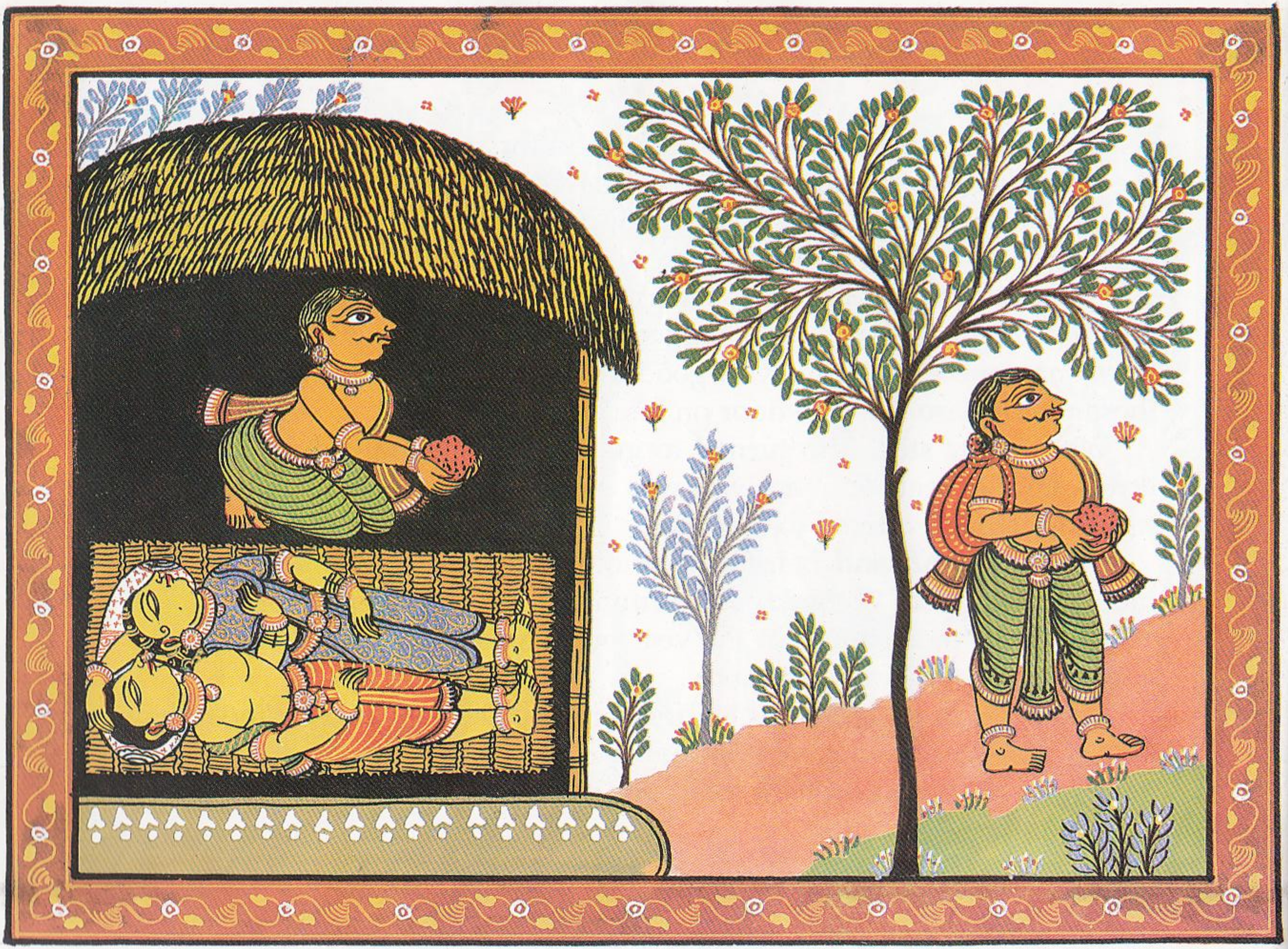
With heavy steps Jiro turned to go back. As he walked on, he came across an old bearded man who was picking up firewood. Immediately Jiro stopped and offered to help him.

"You are kind and helpful," the old man said and smiled. After a moment he added, "I think you are unhappy. What is your problem?"

"Today is the last day of the year but we have no rice to offer to the gods," Jiro replied in a sad voice.

"Here, I will give you this." The old man picked up his bag, took out a pair of millstones and gave it to him.

"But what shall I do with this?" the young man asked.



"These millstones are a treasure," the old man explained. "If you turn the millstones to the right, repeating whatever thing you want, it will come out in as much quantity as you wish. If you turn them to the left, they will stop."

Warmly thanking the old man Jiro returned home where his wife was anxiously waiting for him. "Hurry up and spread out a straw mat here," he told his wife.

His wife spread out the straw mat on which he placed the millstone.

"Make rice, make rice," Jiro said, turning the stones to the right. To their astonishment, rice came pouring out in a steady stream. When there was sufficient rice, Jiro said, "Make salmon, make salmon," continuing to turn millstones and before their delighted eyes, salmon came out. After he had asked for everything necessary for the feast Jiro turned the milestones to the left and they stopped.

The couple had a hearty meal and went to sleep. Next morning they woke up early and made a big offering to the gods. As it was the New Year's day, they invited all their neighbours for a feast.

The news soon reached Taro who could not believe his ears. Unable to

contain his curiosity he came to visit Jiro.

The younger brother received him with open arms and said that he must get some cakes and sweets for him. So he went to the next room. Taro followed on tiptoe. "Make sweets, make cakes," said Jiro, turning the millstones and lo! Delicious sweets and cakes came tumbling out.

"So that's the secret," whispered Taro and hurried back to his place before Jiro could return.

That night when Jiro and his wife were fast asleep, Taro went into the next room. Picking up the millstones as well as some sweets and tying them in a bundle, he stole out into the dark night. "I will go far away," he said to himself and made for the seashore. There he found a boat. He got into it and began to row with all his might.

A strong wind was blowing and the sea seemed rough. Taro was in haste. When he had gone far, far from the seashore, he felt tired and hungry. Untying the bundle he helped himself to the sweets. When he had eaten the whole lot, he felt sick and wanted to taste some salt. He decided to try the millstones.

"Make salt, make salt," he said, turning the millstones as he had watched

his brother do. To his delight salt began to pour from the milestones. He tasted a little salt and felt better, but now he did not know how to stop the stones. They kept on turning until the boat was full of salt. Frightened, he shouted, "Stop, stop." The stones continued to turn.

The boat began to sink. Taro tried to stop the stones. But they continued to turn. "Help, help!" he cried. His voice was lost in the wind.

Finally the boat sank and Taro sank with it, down into the sea.

People believe that to this day the stones are in the sea, turning and turning and making salt. There is no one to turn them to the left. This is why the sea-water is so salty.

Shri Shanti Lal Joshi (b.1948); *Phad Painter*

The Artist : Born at Shahpura in the district of Bhilwara, Rajasthan in a family of traditional Phad painters, Shri Joshi was introduced to the art by his father at the age of seven. The Joshi family, who trace back their association with the phad painters to almost 600 years, have been collectively involved with this traditional art. A graduate from **S.T.C.I.G.D.** Drawing School, Mumbai, Shri Joshi has had the privilege of participating in many national and international painting exhibitions including the showcase of Indian folk paintings at New Delhi Asiad, 1982 and Festival of India, USSR in 1987. Winner of many awards including National Award, State Award, Kala Shree Award at Surajkund etc., he has also provided training to prospective young painters at Bal Bhawan, Goa and National Bal Bhawan, New Delhi.

The Art : Phad painting panoramically presents neighbourhood gods and goddesses like Pabuji, Dev Narayan Ramadala etc. in a series of paintings done on walls. Nowadays some historical episodes associated with the region viz, *Johar* of Rani Padmini of Mewar, the battle of Haldighati etc. are also depicted. The uniqueness of the colours used in the painting stems from the application of stone-based colours, which are more durable. Paintings are also done on khadi silk, cotton cloth and on canvasses in all shapes and sizes.

Shri Anand Singh Shyam and Smt Kalabai Shyam; *Gond Tribal Painters*

The Artist: The Shyam couple have been associated with Gond Tribal Painting since their childhood and both their families have been practitioners of the art. Gond art which was confined to the tribal villages of Mandla and Dindori regions of Madhya Pradesh, got a window to the urban world when the Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal started patronizing it. The Shayam couple, who are in their late thirties, have done wall paintings at various important buildings like Bharat Bhavan, Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, Indira Gandhi National Human Museum, Bhopal etc.

The Art: The Gonds generally take up these wall paintings at the time of house construction though, during the Dushehra festival, new colours are filled in these paintings. While in the wall paintings, natural colours are used, the paintings done during modern times use chemical colours. While both male and female do these paintings together, women mostly do the work of filling up the colours of the figures drawn. The figures are mostly of plants, animals and humans in the belief that they ward off evil spirits. They love to paint animals and foliage to convey the richness of forest life and bring vivacity into these figures through the use of many colours.

Shri Sitt Nyein Aye(b.1963), *Burmese Artist-in-Exile*

Shri Aye, born in Mandalay, Burma, did his graduation from the prestigious State High School of Fine Arts, Mandalay. He became a known painter of Burma having sold around 500 of his paintings to art-lovers in Burma before political unrest began there in 1988. He played an important role in the pro-democracy struggle in his country having started a newspaper, *The Red Gallon*, for dissemination of democratic thinking. Presently living in New Delhi as an exiled artist, he does painting mainly in the modern mode while remarkably inter-weaving the techniques of traditional Burmese paintings.

Shri Bhramarbar Nayak (b1956), *Oriya Pattachitra Painter*

The Artist: Born in Tipuri village in the district of Puri, Orrisa, Shri Nayak did his matriculation followed by a Two Year Diploma from Orissa State handicrafts Design and Training Centre. Though not belonging to a family of traditional *Pattachitra* illustrators, Shri Nayak has excelled in the art having won a National Award, a State Award and the Kalamani Award, Haryana.

The Art: For *Pattachitra* a handmade canvas made of cloth, gum of tamarind seed and chalk stone and a handmade brush made of buffalo hair or rat are used, though nowadays art materials from the market are also used. Natural coloures made of different materials like orpiment, red stones, mematite etc, are used in these paintings giving them a unique hue not easily initiated by industrial paints. Traditionally, these paintings were undertaken on the occasion of various festivals and offered to Lord Jagannatha.

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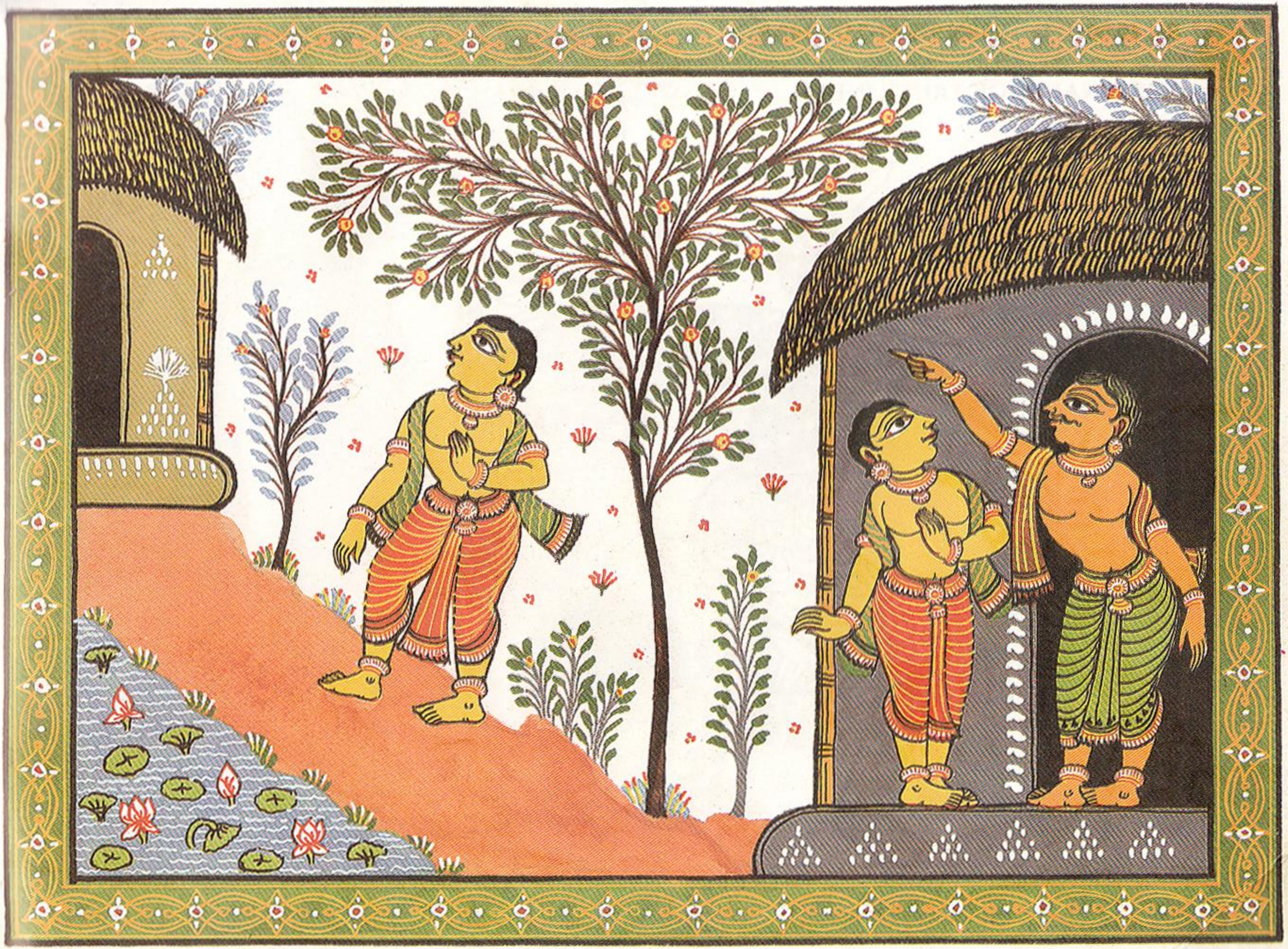

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